



State Library of Massachusetts - Special Collections Department

Ms. Coll. 41

Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers Records, 1982-1988: Guide

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator: Massachusetts. Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers.

Call Number: Ms. Coll. 41

Extent: 3 boxes (2.5 linear feet)

Preferred Citation Style: *Folder Title, Box Number #.* Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers Records. State Library of Massachusetts Special Collections.

About This Finding Aid: Description based on DACS.

Provenance: Received from the office of Senator Richard Kraus, December, 1989.

Processed by: Finding aid prepared by Brenda Howitson, August, 1991. Updated by Abigail Cramer, May, 2012.

Abstract: This collection documents the activities of the Special Commission in its efforts to investigate factors contributing to suicides of young people being held in municipal detention centers for alcohol-related arrests and young people placed in protective custody.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The collection consists of the working papers of the Commission which were collected in the office of Senator Richard Kraus. The collection includes general information about the

Commission and its members, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and testimony in hearings held by the Commission. A major part of the collection is made up of completed questionnaires which were sent by the Commission to community police chiefs. Background information on suicides in jail cells is also included in the collection. Additionally, the collection includes a three-volume set of technical specifications for a retrofit program for municipal police departments; the specifications were prepared for the Commission by the office of Allen M. Lieb, architect.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers was established under Item 0185-7824 of Chapter 289 of the Acts of 1983. The 19-member Commission included three senators, five members of the House of Representatives, and representatives of the Massachusetts Police Chiefs Association, the Commissioners of the Departments of Corrections and Social Services, and the Suffolk County sheriff. The Commission also included parents of alleged suicide victims in municipal detention centers. Senator Richard A. Kraus and Representative Nicholas Buglione served as Chairs of the Commission. Elizabeth Armao served as Executive Director. The purpose of the Commission was to research factors which may have contributed to what was seen as a growing problem of suicides by young persons in alcohol-related arrests and those placed in protective custody.

As the Commission began its work, actual statistics on suicides among people held in local police station cells were not readily available because there was no requirement that they be reported. One of the Commission's actions was to survey municipal police departments across Massachusetts for statistics on these suicides in a 10-year period. The Commission also reviewed procedures for monitoring inmates and for reporting suicides and suicide attempts. A questionnaire was sent out to police chiefs in Massachusetts communities in an effort to determine what standards existed on each facility. Public hearings were held in December, 1983, in Worcester, Boston, and Springfield to hear testimony about the level of care, conditions and procedures in municipal detention centers and to obtain information about otherwise unreported cases of suicide or attempted suicide in detention centers. In addition, the Commission heard testimony at its monthly meetings from experts and interested parties, including former Governor John Volpe, chairman of the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving, who testified that with stricter drunk driving legislation comes the need for procedures to prevent suicides in detention facilities.

After analysis of the questionnaires and other information which had been gathered, the Commission issued its final report in May, 1984. The Commission found that suicide in municipal

lockups occurred at the rate of at least one person per month in Massachusetts. The study identified 100 suicides and 532 attempted suicides in municipal lockups in the 10 years prior to the formation of the Commission. The study also suggested that the people most vulnerable to suicide under these conditions were single, white men who were drunk when they were placed in cells. Many of those who had committed suicide were people who were not under arrest, but who had been detained under the protective custody law.

Along with the report that the Commission issued were recommendations for a comprehensive program of preventive measures, especially increased surveillance of the cell areas. The recommendations also concerned cell inspection, police training and recording of suicides and attempted suicides. Work was to be done with the Departments of Mental and Public Health to improve services available to the police for dealing with drunk and mentally ill detainees. The Department of Public Health also worked with the Commission to implement new regulations for lockups to improve standards of cleanliness, lighting and heating in cells. The commission's work resulted in legislation which required the retrofitting of jail cells in an attempt to make them suicide-proof. In February, 1985, a law was passed to streamline the process by which communities were to be paid for renovating their lockup cells as mandated by legislation passed in December, 1984. Then new legislation set up a grant program to pay local communities up front for the cost of the actual construction work.

The work of the Commission and its study were reportedly the first in the nation to provide an in-depth focus on local lockups. Senator Kraus and Representative Buglione in their press conference in May, 1984, stated, "We believe this report is of great significance, and we are confident that the implementation of our recommendations will save many lives."

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Arrangement

The papers are arranged in their original order from Senator Kraus's office.

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research during the Special Collections Department's regular hours.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

Copyright restrictions may apply. Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with Special Collections staff.

Languages and Scripts

The materials are entirely in English.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Received from the office of Senator Richard Kraus, December, 1989.

Container List

Box #	Folder #	Folder Title	Date
1	1	General information concerning the Commission	undated
1	2	General information - Senator Kraus's file	undated
1	3	Commission members; correspondence	1983-June 1984
1	4	Correspondence	July 1984-1986
1	5	Correspondence	1987-1989
1	6-9	Memos and minutes	1983-1989
1	10	Information concerning Commission public hearings; testimony before the Commission; miscellaneous information	undated
1	11	Press conferences	1984-1985
1	12-14	Proposed changes to DPH and lock-up standards; DPH reports of inspections of local police departments	undated
1	15-16	Special Commission questionnaire	undated
1	17-29	Responses to questionnaire, arranged alphabetically by community name	undated
1	30	Special Commission report; correspondence, etc.	undated
1	31	Final report of the Commission	undated
1	32	Final report of the Commission - printed format	undated
1	33-35	Special Commission legislation	undated

1	36-37	Lock-up legislation	1982-1987
1	38	Changes to legislation	1985-1987
1	39-40	Massachusetts policies and procedures; police procedures	undated
2	41	Suicide prevention training	1984-1985
2	42	Mass. Criminal Justice Training Council: Suicide prevention, intervention and detection while in Massachusetts lock-ups (draft)	1985
2	43	Drunk driving statistics	undated
2	44-46	Media reports of cases; articles concerning the Special Commission	undated
RETROFITTING OF CELLS			
2	47	Implementation and renovations to jails	undated
2	48	Retrofitting problems	1985-1988
2	49	Department of Public Health: Proposed cell regulations	1986-1987
2	50	Retrofitting deadline	1986
2	51	Bid information for retrofitting	undated
2	52	Retrofitting	undated
2	53	Information regarding mandated costs to municipalities	1986-1987
2	54	Time clocks	1987
2	55	Boston lexan	1987-1988
2	56	Literature resources	undated
2	57-70	Background studies	undated
2	71-72	Information concerning Allen Lieb's contract and services	undated

2	73-79	Vol. 1: "Technical specifications. Municipal police departments, retrofit program." For the: Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers, Aug. 7. 1985. Prepared by: The Office of Allen M. Lieb. Architect.	undated
2	80-83	Vol. 2	undated
3	84-87	Vol. 2	undated
3	88-96	Vol. 3: Field survey, technical specifications, municipal police departments, retrofit program	undated
3	97	Photographs showing cracked lexan in cells	November, 1987